

BLM STEWARDSHIP CONTRACTING: Q's and A's

What is Stewardship Contracting?

Stewardship contracting is a new authority for the BLM, contained in the 2003 Appropriations Act (P.L. 108-7). Stewardship involves caring for the public lands through broad-based public and community involvement. The contracts would be designed to achieve ecological restoration and maintenance objectives that may include the capture of some value of forest or rangeland material that is created as a part of the project. This material would offset the cost to taxpayers of the restoration project and should provide opportunities for local economic development in the fields of biomass for energy and alternative wood products. This is especially important in areas that have been historically dependent on commercial timber sales.

Ultimately, these contracts will make forests and rangelands more resilient to natural disturbances, such as wind, flood, fire, insects, and disease. Key features of the new authority:

- Allow for the exchange of goods for services;
- Facilitate land restoration and enhancement efforts by using value of traded goods to meet land health goals;
- Require contracts to be awarded based on “best value” basis as opposed to strict revenue generation;
- Permit contracts of up to 10 years in order to add value to material such as biomass for energy that requires certainty of supply to encourage investment in local communities;
- Encourage agreements with nonprofit organizations;
- Require contracts to be designed for end results.

What are the land health goals of stewardship contracting?

Stewardship contracting is intended to achieve key land-management goals that improve, maintain, or restore forest or rangeland health; restore or maintain water quality; improve fish and wildlife habitat; reestablish native plant species and increase their resilience to insects and disease; and reduce hazardous fuels that pose risks to communities and ecosystem values through an open, collaborative process. The legislation also requires that projects meet local and rural community needs in addition to the land management goals.

Does stewardship contracting replace other programs, like the timber sale program?

No. Stewardship contracting is a new tool for the contracting toolbox to accomplish restoration work on the land as part of the President's Healthy Forest Initiative. Stewardship contracts will not replace either timber sale contracts or service contracts. They provide a way to combine elements of both in new ways to make it easier to achieve ecological goals in an efficient and collaborative manner.

How does stewardship contracting affect the role for public input and other aspects of the NEPA process?

Because projects must meet local and rural community needs, collaboration with local interests is emphasized. However, every project will include adherence to the appropriate NEPA process, and there is no change to the public comment process. We will continue to comply with all laws such as Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act, and projects will meet the direction of BLM's land use plans, and management policies relating to existing special designations (e.g., Wilderness).

What are the BLM and the Forest Service announcing?

Both the Bureau and the Forest Service are announcing the final guidance that they will be issuing to their field units on how to develop, implement, and monitor stewardship contracts and agreements. This new direction builds on lessons learned by the Forest Service using their pilot authority. The BLM has gone forward with their first few contracts in 2003.

What does the guidance contain?

The guidance will help local field managers and foresters implement stewardship contracting uniformly to achieve the goals the President and Congress designed in the law. The guidance describes:

- project design goals and objectives;
- office roles and responsibilities;
- direction for use of excess offset value;
- emphasis that generation of monies is a secondary consideration to restoration activities;
- direction for project submission, accomplishment reporting, and project financial tracking; and
- direction for third-party monitoring, coordination, and collaboration.

How does the stewardship contracting language in P.L. 108-7 affect the BLM?

The legislation extends authority already granted to the U.S. Forest Service on a pilot basis, to the BLM. Primarily it authorizes the BLM to:

- exchange goods removed for restoration services provided;
- enter into stewardship contracts for periods of up to 10 years;
- use multiparty monitoring to assess the program and report to Congress on the results; and
- award contracts based on "best value," which allows for consideration of performance as well as bid price.

Has the BLM already awarded any stewardship contracts?

Yes. The BLM already has two stewardship projects. Both contracts are in Oregon and focus on fuels reduction with forest product removal. The two contracts were awarded to local contractors. Two projects (one in Elk City, ID and one in Vernal, UT) are in the contract development stages. Two additional project proposals have been approved (one each in California and Oregon). The field will be sending several more projects for review and approval.

What do the terms “timber sale,” “service contract,” and “stewardship contracts” mean in the legislation and the direction?

A “timber sale” is the sale of commercial forest products, always with a return of receipts to the U.S. Treasury and always with a primary goal of producing commercial forest products.

“Service contracts” are contracts for services (such as pre-commercial thinning, trail maintenance, and fuel reduction), where the government pays with appropriated dollars for the entire cost of restoration services with no return revenues to the U.S. Treasury. The primary goal of these contracts is to acquire services to produce desired land health outcomes on the land.

“Stewardship contracts” are contracts for ecological restoration services in which some of the costs may be offset by the value of vegetative material removed. Stewardship contracts combine elements of both contracts in new ways with new authorities that make it easier to meet ecological goals in an efficient and collaborative manner. Excess receipts, if generated, would be used for additional restoration work.